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Organizing Action Nets

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# Exploring the Performativity Turn in Management Studies

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## *Abstract*

One of the contemporary “turns” in management studies is the “performativity” turn. In this paper, we present a genealogy of the concept of performativity as it has been used in management and organization studies (MOS). Starting with the work of Austin, Bateson, Goffman and Lyotard, we move on to more recent debates surrounding the use of the concept by Butler and the STS researchers Callon, Latour and Law, as well as how their ideas have been further translated within MOS. The focus is on how the concept is defined and on the areas of study where performativity has been used. Taken together, the approach to performativity employed has implications for how the concept is understood and translated. Finally, we discuss the particular ontological position of the performative perspective, and its methodological consequences.



## Introduction

One of the contemporary “turns” in management studies is the “performativity” turn. The concept can be found in calls for papers, in tracks at conferences and, of course, in publications. It is evident that the concept of “performativity” is now being displayed and used in many, more or less similar, versions. A quick search on the keyword “performativity” on Google Scholar returned no less than 40,200 hits (January 2013). The combination “performativity” + “management” returned 18,500 hits (January 2013). “Performativity” + “Austin” – a scholar who is often (but not always) claimed to be the original source of the term – gave 8,980 hits. (Scandinavian Journal of Management + performativity gave 269 hits for “performativity”, mainly published 2010–2012.) This variation in Google Scholar results depicts the aim of this paper.

The reason for the high quantity and many different versions of “performativity” may be described as a result of the fact that the concept itself is a performative utterance; i.e. an utterance that not only “says” something, but also “does” it (Austin, 1962). Thus, when using the concept, people act upon it, and all of these actions can be seen as local translations of the concept (Latour, 1987; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Esposito, 2012). As *something* is translated, it becomes disembedded from its local practice in order to travel to a new local practice. As part of such a process, what is translated is then transformed; in other words, it changes when embedded in new local practices. Thus, the way in which performativity is performed may differ between different times/spaces (Butler, 2010). The variety in performances means that the concept of performativity runs the risk of becoming too broad and too vague to be useful. Hence, there is a need to examine the various traditions in which the concept has been developed, and through which it has been translated.

In this paper, we present a genealogy of the concept of performativity as it has been used in management and organization studies (MOS). Starting with the work of Austin, Bateson, Goffman and Lyotard, we move on to more recent debates surrounding the use of the concept by Butler and the STS researchers Callon, Latour and Law, as well as how their ideas have been further translated within MOS. The focus is on how the concept is defined and on the areas of study where performativity has been used. Taken together, the approach to performativity employed has implications for how the concept is understood and translated. Finally, we discuss the particular ontological position of the performative perspective, and its methodological consequences.

## Back to The roots: Austin, Goffman, Bateson and Lyotard

The roots of the concept of performativity may be found in the linguistic philosophy of John Austin, the communication theory of Gregory Bateson, the social theory of Erving Goffman, and the social philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard. While Austin developed the notion that performativity is meaningful utterances that are neither true nor false, but utterances that create potential, i.e. *what performativity is*, Goffman was more occupied with the notion of *how performativity comes about*, pointing to the conditions of context and staging, and the creation of relationships. Bateson and Lyotard, on the other hand, emphasized *where performativity emerges*. Bateson pointed to the role of interactions within the system and Lyotard to the role of the language-game being employed within the system.

### *Austin*

In his seminal piece *How to do things with words* Austin explains the concept of performativity in the following manner:

“... [it] is derived, of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performance of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.” (Austin, 1962: 6-7)

The plasticity of the concept is coined in that sentence. Performativity includes the simultaneous “saying” and “acting/doing”. Once something is uttered, people start to act upon it. It includes a promise that the utterance is built upon a certain intention. A famous example is the utterance “I do”, as used in the marriage act, indicating that someone has the intention of taking someone else as his/her spouse. The phrase “I do” goes beyond reporting, as it includes acting, and being acted upon, as married people once the statement has been made within the correct procedures of marriage.

According to Austin, (1) performative utterances do not just describe/report/constate but also have the potential to create (new) reality; additionally, (2) performative utterances fall outside the conventional true/false dichotomy:

Utterances can be found, satisfying these conditions, yet such that they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true’ or ‘false’; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something. (Austin, 1962:5)

Thus, performativity came to be shaped as a meaningful action taking place beyond the paradigm of correspondent truth. In other words, representations were able to perform, but performances could not be reduced to representations.

### *Goffman*

While Austin defined performativity clearly, Goffman did not talk directly about the concept. His contribution to the conceptualization of performativity could, however, be understood as a way of explaining how performativity comes about. Of key importance here is Goffman's theatre metaphor (1974). The setting of a scene on stage – the physical definition of the stage, its backstage, and the audience, as well as the agreement between the actors and the audience regarding their reciprocal roles – creates the conditions for the actors' utterances on stage to produce reality, according to Goffman. It is, in other words, the very framing of the stage, separating the front stage from the backstage and from the audience, which shapes the performativity of the utterances made possible on stage. Based on this metaphor, Goffman argues that this is what social life is like; performativity is made possible through the framing of the social scene (etc).

A footnote in Goffman (1974, p. 44) inscribes Austin's (1962) concept of "performative utterances" within Goffman's concept of "keying". Goffman quotes a passage where Austin disregarded performative utterances that he deemed unreliable and parasitic upon normal use. Contrary to Austin, Goffman argues that the process of transcribing the form of one activity into another, which will then be patterned on the first, but will signify something else, is essential for participants in social situations when answering the question "what is it that's going on here?" Goffman termed that kind of questioning "frame analysis", since knowing the key or keys enabled a successful answer and hence a framing of the social scene (Goffman, 1974).

### *Bateson*

If Goffman operated with widely-known Western European cultural metaphors of theatre, Bateson used the rather specialist jargon of systems theory. Drawing his inspiration from the system-cybernetic tradition, and explaining actions in terms of being performative within the system which they were a part of, Bateson, in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), laid out how order emerges in complex organisms that interact with the environment. In articulating that processes of ordering are performative rather than representational actions, Bateson meant, unlike Austin, that separate actions or organisms can only function as systems that interact with their environments. Thus, for Bateson, mind and order are not rationalistic notions, but performative within their ecologies/environments. Management studies, Bateson thought, somewhat ironically, were developed in the direction of ecology of organizations, with a focus on processes and boundary construction; so aptly revealed in the famous Bateson example of a blind man and a stick (the blind man's personality begins with the stick, but where exactly?).



## *Lyotard*

Similar to Bateson, Lyotard's contribution to the development of the concept of performativity considered where performativity emerges. While Bateson discussed the role of interaction, Lyotard, in his book *The Post-Modern Condition* (1979), started out from the notion of "language games". His idea was based upon a presentation of Austin's definition of denotative and performative utterances, stressing three underlying principles: (1) the legitimation of a statement is the result of a contract between the players of the (language) game.; (2) since it is a game, there will be rules; and (3) "every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game" (Lyotard, 1979/1984: 10).

"Performative", according to Lyotard, is thus related to the result of process input-output, i.e. the relationships connecting more explicitly to "performativity" as the achieved results of production. In a footnote, Lyotard explained this association in the following way:

"The term performative has taken on a precise meaning in language theory since Austin. Later in this book, this concept will reappear in association with the term performativity (in particular, of a system) in the new current sense of efficiency measured according to an input/output ratio. The two meanings are not far apart. Austin's performative realizes the optimal performance." (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 88, footnote 30, italics in the original)

Lyotard emphasized the relationship between performative, performativity and performance. In doing so, he stressed a part of the process behind performativity, i.e. that performativity emerges as a result of something being produced.

## *From roots to branches and leaves: Butler, Latour, Callon, Law, and Management studies*

So far, the roots of the concept of performativity have been traced via the ideas of four scholars; Austin, Goffman, Bateson and Lyotard. In the following, we will examine in more detail how the ideas of these scholars have been developed by four academics who are more contemporary– Butler, Latour, Callon and Law – and how their ideas have been used in recent management studies.

### *Butler: gender performativity and doing gender in organizations*

In her theory of gender performativity, Butler (1990; 1993; 2010) started out from both Austin and Lyotard. Instead of viewing gender as a noun, Butler suggested that gender performs the identity it is purported to be. This means that there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender – the idea of a gendered core is an

illusion – but that gender is performatively constituted by the very expressions said to be its results. Simply put: a woman and a man are the results of the actions, e.g. words, gestures, or clothes that make the woman or the man into a woman or a man. This idea is closely related to Austin's notion of performativity (1962).

Butler suggested that the body is *constantly* being performed as gendered and that, in order to be gendered, the performance must be repeated over time. This process is political, according to Butler, since the performing of gender is set in a specific context; in a certain time and place infused with meanings that are socially established. The performing of gender helps to legitimate these meanings; thus, the notion of what is "feminine" and "masculine" changes only slowly over time. This notion of productive power, i.e. the notion that the performing of gender also involves acts of power, is not too dissimilar to Lyotard's notion that performativity is the result of production.

In management and organization studies, some have labeled Butler's notion of performativity 'poststructuralist and discursive', focusing on how discourses influence the formation of gendered subjects, as opposed to the ethnological gender theory of West & Zimmerman (1987) that emphasizes how gender is done during interactions (Kelan, 2010). Others have labeled Butler's gender theory "the performance/social practice approach", as opposed to the discursive/textual approach (Pullen, 2006). Common to all of these studies, however, is the notion of the production and reproduction of social identity, and that both masculinity and femininity are performed through the coincidence and co-participation of discourse and action constituting performativity.

Empirically, studies have been carried out in order to develop a general understanding of what influences and performs gender in organizations (Harding, 2003; Hancock & Tyler, 2007; Tyler & Cohen, 2008; Panayiotou, 2010; Philips & Knowles, 2012;), how masculinity and femininity are performed by people at work (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005; Poggio, 2006; Pullen & Knights, 2007; Schilt & Connell, 2007; Marsh & Musson, 2008; Knights & Tullberg, 2011; Haynes, 2012; McDonald, 2012), in specific areas such as entrepreneurship (Bruni et al 2004), leadership (Pini, 2005; Binns, 2008), and project management (Hodgson, 2005), and more recently in the field of intersectionality (Styhre & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008; Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010; Holvino, 2010). The Butler version of performativity has also been applied by critical management theorists (see, for instance, Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman 2009; Crevani, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2010; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012), who include critical perspectives and strive toward elaborating methods of investigating forms of leadership which include emancipatory ideals.

*Latour: the ostensive and the performative,  
organizational routines, technology and change*

While Butler is occupied with the notion of how the identity of the (gendered) subject is performed, Latour's version of performativity relates instead to society and the continuous construction of it through the ongoing performances of the social. In this part of the paper, we will show how the notion of performativity, as presented by Bruno Latour (1986; 1987), has been translated within organization studies. Latour proposed a shift from an ostensive definition of society, based on principle, to a performative definition of society, based on practice. From this perspective, society is constructed through the many efforts made to define it, which also allows us to understand the notion of (for example) power as a consequence of, and not as a cause of, collective action.

Performativity has been a central part of what has become known as science and technology studies (STS), with a particular focus on how technology and scientific knowledge are constructed (see, for example, Latour and Woolgar, 1979/1986; Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Latour, 1986, 1987). Strum and Latour (1987) emphasized that the two positions, the ostensive and the performative perspectives, differ both in principle and in practice in their definition of the social. According to the ostensive definition, it is "in principle, possible to discover the typical properties of what holds a society together, properties which could explain the social link and its evolution, although in practice, it may be difficult to detect them" (p.784). From this perspective, society exists and actors enter it by adhering to rules and structures that are already determined. On the contrary, adhering to the performative model, Strum and Latour suggest that it is "impossible, in principle, to establish properties which would be peculiar to life in society, although, in practice it is possible to do so" (p. 785). This means that actors define, both for themselves and for others, what society is, in practice, through their actions; accordingly, they perform society by doing what is necessary for their success. The shift from the ostensive to the performative view would, according to Latour, allow us to understand society as continuously being constructed or "performed" by active social beings; thus making it possible to trace associations (Latour, 2005).

Today, the notion of performativity is employed in several other fields, not least in organization studies. Here, it has been translated, however, in various ways. Here, three areas will be described: organizational routines, decision making, technology in organizations and organizational change.

In 2003, Feldman and Pentland used Latour's distinction between ostensive and performative in order to show how routines are sources of change and stability simultaneously. The ostensive aspect of the routine is the routine in principle, referring to abstract, narrative descriptions, while the performative aspect of the routine is the routine in action consisting of "actual performances by specific people, at specific times, in specific places" (Feldman & Pentland,

2003:95). This means that their point of departure is a view of organizational routines as dualities; they argue that “[b]oth of these aspects are necessary for an organizational routine to exist.” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 101). Their use of ostensive and performative aspects has been widely cited and used in order to show, for example, how to bridge different perspectives on organizational learning (Levinthal and Rerup, 2006), how to create coordinating mechanisms in practice (Jarzabkowski, 2012), and as a conceptual framework for multilevel research on organizational routines and capabilities (Salvato and Rerup, 2011). Thus, this widespread use of performativity is connected to, but also conditioned by, the ostensive aspects. This shows a use of performativity that differs from that of Latour (1986), who emphasized a shift *from* ostensive *to* performative definitions of society.

Another area in which performativity is used is studies of technology and sociomaterial practices (e.g. Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). Within organization studies, technology is increasingly being conceived of as under the influence of its use in a social setting and day-to-day interactions between users and technology. Such a perspective admits that the negotiated or enacted use of technology often differs from the prescribed, mechanical operation of technology (Orlikowski, 1996; Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001), something that Kallinikos (2004) has described as the normative and performative aspects of technology (see also Eriksson-Zetterquist et al., 2009). Lindberg and Walter (2012) have argued that performative definitions of organization also entail performative definitions of objects – objects too, are enacted into being – and when an object changes, the practices and relations related to that object also change.

Within the field of organizational change, Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) have suggested – building on Latour (1986) – that organizational change should be studied from a translation perspective, rather than from a diffusion perspective; highlighting the notion of imitation in order to explain organizational change. An ostensive definition of imitation implies that what is being imitated is seen as something given, an immutable [for the concept of ‘immutable mobiles’ see Latour 1987]; something that has an inert energy allowing it to diffuse from one place and time to another. This diffusion perspective means that an imitated strategy or technology does not change as it is adopted; it is spread by its own energy. However, if a performative definition of imitation is adopted, it will be possible to explore imitation as: “a process in which something is created and transformed by chains of translations” (Sevón, 1996:51). Thus, according to Sevón, building on Latour, when an organization imitates an idea, it not only adapts it, it also adopts it, and translates it in order to fit its own context. The implication of this argument is, of course, that whatever is spread is *not* immutable; it changes as it is translated from ideas and materialized into objects and actions. By assuming a performative definition of society when exploring organizational change, we are shifting from a perspective of diffusion to a perspective of translation (see also Latour, 1996).

### *Callon, generic and effective performativity in financial and mundane markets*

The third branch of the genealogy of the concept of performativity is constituted by Callon's application of performativity to the study of markets and by the way his ideas have contributed to the development of economic sociology. Callon's unorthodox statement is that "economics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions" (Callon, 1998:2). In using "economics in the broad sense", Callon refers not only to economic theory, but also to ideas, peoples, skills, datasets, techniques, procedures and tools. This far-reaching argument, suggesting that economic theory is not to be treated as an explanatory tool in market analysis but rather as a part of the practice that performs market exchange, has been expanded upon by Callon himself (e.g. Callon 2007; 2010) and by many others (e.g. Callon & Muniesa, 2005; Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; MacKenzie & Millo, 2003; MacKenzie, Muniesa & Siu, 2007).

Empirical studies have mainly been conducted along two major branches: financial markets (e.g. MacKenzie, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 2007) and mundane markets like retailing (e.g. Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; 2007; Cochoy 2010). A recurring argument is that, in order to develop an understanding of the performative role of economics in market practices, empirical studies are needed (MacKenzie, 2003).

Developing Callon's ideas, MacKenzie (2007) suggests classifying the concept of performativity as either "generic" or "effective". While generic performativity refers to when "an aspect of economics (a theory, model, concept, procedure, data-set, etc) is used by participants in economic processes, regulators, etc." (MacKenzie, 2007:55), effective performativity refers to when "the practical use of an aspect of economics has an effect on economic processes" (Ibid.). Effective performativity can be further classified into the two categories of: "Barnesian" and "counterperformativity". Barnesian performativity refers to when the "practical use of an aspect of economics make economic processes more like their depiction by economics" (Ibid.), while "counterperformativity" refers to when the "practical use of an aspect of economics makes economic processes less like their depiction by economics" (Ibid.). In studies of financial markets, cases have often been closely related to specific theories, models or formulas. One of MacKenzie's most famous studies is that of the Black-Sholes-Merton formula where he shows how this formula for option pricing was used in transforming the economy in order to make the formula more "real", and how the fit was gradually improved as the model exerted a performative effect when in use (MacKenzie, 2003). Similar studies include Hault and Ranielli's (2009) study of the creation of a market for credit derivatives; Hault and Rainelli-Weiss' (2011) study of weather derivatives, and Pollock and Williams' (2009) study of how analytical models are used by industry analysts. Yet another stream of research

drawing on this view of performativity has studied decision theory as practice (Cabantous, Gond and Johnson-Cramer, 2010; Cabantous and Gond, 2011).

Performativity has also been explored in more mundane markets (e.g. Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; 2007; Cochoy 2010). Kjellberg & Helgesson (2006) state that, in mundane markets, many different tools, theories, models etc may be involved in the shaping of those markets. This means that multiplicity should be taken into account. In these situations, the notion of generic performativity is more relevant. With reference to Law and Urry (2004), Kjellberg and Helgesson claim that; “If methods and practices are performative, then we should conceive of multiple realities rather than multiple perspectives on a single reality” (2006:849). In order to investigate performativity in mundane markets, they propose not to separate between a world of ideas and the real world out there in a priori, but seeing “ideas and realities as maintained and interrelated through supply chains of practical translations” (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006: 851). However, such a claim is likely to have major empirical and methodological implications since it suggests a move away from the idea of performative effects of theory, and evaluation of the causal relations between theory and practice, toward studies of *how* markets are performed in everyday practices and how economic theory might be included as a part of the fabrics used in the development of such practices (see also Cochoy, Giraudeau, & McFall, 2010; Du Gay, 2010). This understanding is much in line with Strum and Latour’s (1987: 784-785) early notion of performativity as a sociological perspective in its own right. In addition, this conceptualization of performativity has also been used in studies of how organization theory affects organizational practices (Czarniawska, 2007), as well as in studies of risk and accountability, focusing on the issue of what needs to be performed in order to avoid further risk (Czarniawska, 2011).

### *Law: the sociology of verbs, technological change and storytelling*

The fourth branch of genealogy is based on Law’s take on performativity, an attempt to explain how “ordering effects”— from devices (e.g. Law, 1987; 1988) to organizations (e.g. Law, 1994) — are performed into being. He argued in favor of a sociology of verbs, suggesting that power, organizations, mind-body dualisms, and macro-micro distinctions may all be understood as the local performances of recursive modes of social ordering (Law, 1994). Entities, in other words, are performed in, through, and by the very relations that define them. What is interesting to Law is the question of *how* such entities are performed into relations that are stabilized for long enough to generate their effects (Law, 1991; 1999).

Law and Singleton (2000) discuss performativity by examining it in the context of technological change; how technology is made sense of through storytelling and how such storytelling interferes with other “performances of



techno-science”. They suggest that performances do not exist in the abstract: they always take place in the context of other performances and need to be enacted. The former means that the success of any performance is uncertain and that anomalous performances tend to be unsuccessful because they cannot recruit the right actors. Thus: “new performances interact with enactments of older performances to mimic and reaffirm them”; or to interfere with them and present possible alternatives (Law & Singleton, 2000: p 774). The fact that performances are enacted is quite obvious since they are material practices, which take place continuously – every single day, hour and minute. Since performances are so specific, this leads to multiplicity; what appears to be one thing, e.g. an “object”, “knowledge”, “science”, “assessment” or “organization”, may in fact be thought of as a set of related performances (*ibid*).

Furthermore, the notion of organization as a performance has been used in studies on organizational change to account for the materiality of such change (e.g. Parker, 1997; Doolin, 2003), as opposed to focusing only on the discursive arrangements (e.g. Grant et al. 1998). Others have examined the role of stories and storytelling in coordination and organizing between and among organizations, but also between and among social worlds (Diedrich, Walter and Czarniawska, 2011). Yet another stream of organizational researchers has used Law and Singleton’s (2000) ideas about performing technological realities through “technology stories” as narratives of ordering in order to examine the introduction of new technology as part of organizing (e.g. Bruni, 2005; Knights et al., 2007).

There has been a focus on organization, in terms of ongoing and open-ended performances involving heterogeneous modes of action and materialization, by organization theorists pushing for a shift in focus toward practice-based studies of organizing (see, for instance, Suchman, 2000; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2003; Nicolini, 2010; Lindberg & Walter, 2012). Suchman (2000), for example, examined the building of a bridge as a variety of practical performances by means of which the work of organizing gets done. However, in this kind of work of technology construction, the interest usually lies in engineering and calculations as explanations of organizational action and Suchman (2000) shows how these are instead the products of organizing, in turn shaping what the organization is or could be.

The idea that knowledge is performed in, by, and through social relations which are relatively stable and “stay in place” (Law, 1992), in their capacity to deploy a variety of heterogeneous materials in support of action, has also been used by Gherardi and Nicolini (2003) to examine knowing in organizations in terms of being performed as materially heterogeneous practice, including documents, devices, people and money, to name a few. Here, knowing is not tied to any particular location: it does not reside in people’s heads, on a spreadsheet, in texts or machines, or in the skills of carpenters. Knowing is a relational moment or an effect, not an essential substance.

These studies of organizations as ongoing performances entail, among other things, the abandoning of the dominant belief that the subject is the source of meaning and knowledge in favor of the notion that knowledge and meaning reside in practices (Nicolini, 2010) and the realization that ‘actors’ or ‘organizations’ are the products of, rather than the sources of, the organizing (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 780).

### ***Concluding remarks: Performative characteristics***

In this research note, we have shown that the concept of performativity has been translated into numerous versions, in a variety of studies. More specifically, we have shown how the work of various scholars, e.g. Austin, Goffman, Bateson and Lyotard, emphasizing performativity, has influenced management and organization studies (MOS). We emphasize how the widespread concept of performativity has different connotations and is performed differently depending on its ongoing translation by the researchers using it. Based on the exposition made, we want to draw attention to the particular ontological position of the performative perspective and its methodological consequences.

Applying a performative perspective implies an *ontological position* where the notion of the world in constant becoming is essential. This position also includes the principle of symmetry between verbal and non-verbal actions, as well as between humans and non-humans. When studying verbal and non-verbal actions and practices of organizing, possibilities of finding new ways of understanding classical organizational phenomena such as power, identity, boundaries, and culture appear. In fact, the performative perspective shifts away from the understanding of, for example, power as a cause of collective action to an understanding of power as a consequence of collective action (Latour, 1986). Among the different uses of performativity in MOS, an ambiguity sometimes appears between treating performativity as an ontological perspective or as an epistemological position. When using performativity as an epistemological position, there is a tendency to use concepts or ideas in terms of being performative in a more essentialist way, treating organizational phenomena as given. In doing so, there is a tendency to use performativity as something of a guiding principle, focusing more attention on results than on processes.

*Methodologically*, particular attention is given to practice and how actions contribute to the ongoing construction of organizing. The principle of symmetry between verbal and non-verbal actions, as well as between humans and non-humans, suggests that analytical distinctions are not made in advance; rather, they emerge from the field material. As Czarniawska (2002), for example, has pointed out, “with performative definitions, organizations are ascribed neither a nature nor an essence in any absolute sense; rather, organizations are considered to be what the people producing them made them at the time when



those who were the observers conducted their observations” (p. 316). The methodological consequence of this is that studies carried out on the basis of a performative perspective should not privilege specific entities, but rather follow actions and how these connect into stabilized patterns and construct entities with identities. Thus, rather than focusing on what has already been stabilized, “the organization”, we suggest using actions as a starting point when studying organizational phenomena, on the premise that connections between actions allow a more elaborated understanding of the ongoing process of organizing.

In sum, we have argued that a performative understanding or view of the organizational phenomena under study requires a methodological awareness and a focus on the performance itself. In such translations, partly due to ontological and epistemological considerations, there are variations in the attention paid to sociomaterial aspects and to the importance of everyday practices and actions. Thus, performativity embraces richness in its (emergent) conceptualization and use.

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